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## How Nearly 50 Artists' Attempted to Do the Impossible: Illustrate Michael Jackson's Enormous Influence and Legacy

by Stephanie Eckardt  
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Perhaps the best illustration of just how sizable Michael Jackson's influence on contemporary art is Kehinde Wiley's towering, sumptuous portrait of the icon as King Philip II, which is in fact taller than the artist, whose highly anticipated official portrait of Barack Obama was unveiled earlier this year, himself. It's now on display to the general public for the first time ever at London's National Portrait Gallery until October in the inaugural stop of the new exhibition "Michael Jackson: On the Wall," whose worldwide tour will continue into 2020. Featuring nearly 50 artists, the show spans generations from KAWS to Keith Haring—something that Jackson would no doubt approve of, given that according to Wiley, he was in fact something of an art history buff, eager to discuss the differences between Rubens' late and early brushwork. And while their works all illustrate how Jackson's legacy is alive and well a decade after his death, the show also illustrate how his influence on each differs. There's his unavoidable impact on pop culture, seen through a few obligatory Andy Warhol portraits, Jackson's onstage ensembles, and a tribute to an 11-year-old Jackson's title of *Rolling Stone's* youngest ever cover star. There's also quite a few explorations of his historical significance to black identity and race; the buzzy 35-year-old painter Njideka Akunyili Crosby created a work specifically for this exhibition, providing a snapshot of how Jackson shifted how, when growing up in Nigeria, her community "saw, consumed and revered images of things from Western culture." As she put it, "MJ was particularly special because he was as cool—if not cooler—than the others and he was black!" Take a look inside the show, here.

Todd Gray, *Exquisite Terribleness in the Mangrove*, 2014. On display in "Michael Jackson: On the Wall" at the National Portrait Gallery in London through October 2018.

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